

Nadler Criticizes American Muslim Council for Suggesting that Shuttle Disaster Was Act of G-D

Tuesday, 04 February 2003

WASHINGTON -- Responding to a reprehensible statement issued by the American Muslim Council, which suggested that the recent loss of the Space Shuttle Columbia and its entire crew was an act of divine retribution against Israel, Congressman Jerrold Nadler (D-NY), in a letter today, called on AMC Executive Director Eric Erfan Vickers to repudiate his remarks. The letter to Mr. Vickers, as well as the full statement of the AMC Executive Director is below.

February 4, 2003

Mr. Eric Erfan Vickers

Executive Director

American Muslim Council

1212 New York Avenue NW, Suite 400

Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Vickers:

I read with shock your message of February 3, entitled "Seeing the Signs," in which you appear to suggest that the recent tragic loss of the Space Shuttle Columbia and its entire crew was an act of divine retribution against Israel, and attributable to the presence of the first Israeli astronaut on the mission.

In particular, you stated that "I have been tempted to contact her to ask if she sees a sign in the calamitous destruction of the one hundred and thirteenth space shuttle mission taking place over a city named Palestine, while on board was the first Israeli astronaut, who also happened to have been the pilot that bombed several years ago an Iraqi nuclear facility. I was curious how she - or the Book of Revelations - might view or explain this strangely ironic set of facts as war looms on the horizon."

It is unthinkable that any American would take such perverse pleasure in a tragedy that so greatly affects not only the people of the United States, but also the people of India and Israel, and which has drawn expressions of sympathy and solidarity from leaders around the world. Moreover, to presume that a divine purpose reflects one's own hateful feelings toward the Jewish People is insulting to all people of faith and good will.

I would urge you to reflect on your comments, and to apologize to those Americans, of all faiths and of all national origins, who have joined together in a great moment of national healing following this terrible tragedy. Hate and a perverse pleasure in the deaths of these heroes are inappropriate at a time like this.

Sincerely,

Jerrold Nadler

Member of Congress

-----Original Message-----

From: American Muslim Council

Sent: Monday, February 03, 2003 8:22 PM

To: amc@amconline.biglist.com

Subject: AMC Exec Director Message: Seeing the Signs

"The Book of Revelations," she said in pointing to her Bible, "tells of the things to come and the signs to watch for." This was the sum and substance of a conversation I happened to have with a fellow passenger on a plane ride the night before the spaceship Columbia disintegrated before the eyes of the world.

I have been tempted to contact her to ask if she sees a sign in the calamitous destruction of the one hundred and thirteenth space shuttle mission taking place over a city named Palestine, while on board was the first Israeli astronaut, who also happened to have been the pilot that bombed several years ago an Iraqi nuclear facility. I was curious how she - or the Book of Revelations - might view or explain this strangely ironic set of facts as war looms on the horizon.

However, I think that one need not possess any particular spiritual insight to discern a message from this shocking event. American technology, as flexed in the space program, is unparalleled among nations and in human history. But it is hardly infallible. As our nation beats the drums of war while banking on America's high-tech military capabilities, perhaps the unexpected deaths of those brave astronauts was meant to remind us that even the most sophisticated systems break down.

In the days and months ahead, NASA and others will conduct intensive investigations and analyses to determine the root cause of the spaceship's sudden destruction. Whatever resources or amount of time is needed will be devoted to finding and fixing the problem in order to avoid any other lives being lost. Perhaps this was meant as a reminder of how America should conduct itself - exhaustively seeking solutions that save lives.

Until the Columbia blew up in just coming down to earth, little attention had been paid to the dangers of returning from the journey. Maybe this was meant to remind us that the risks in ending a mission are as great as the ones in beginning it.

Whether any of this amounts to a sign from God about America's future is a matter of one's beliefs. All that is certain is that, for the unforeseen deaths of those seven people, there is both an explanation and a reason.

Eric Erfan Vickers

Executive Director

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